

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (previously presented) A method for tracking use of an ultrasound probe, said method comprising:

storing probe identification information and different types of tracking information within a memory in a connector of an ultrasound probe removably connectable to an ultrasound system, wherein the different types of tracking information include duration of use information and at least one of length of time between scans information and probe usage pattern information, the probe usage pattern information including at least a length of time for each use; and

accessing the stored tracking information within the connector of the ultrasound probe.

2. (previously presented) A method in accordance with claim 1 further comprising:

updating the tracking information based on use of the ultrasound probe; and

storing the updated tracking information within one of the connector and the ultrasound probe.

3. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises duration of use information.

4. (previously presented) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information further comprises at least one of temperature information and temperature power off information.

5. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the tracking information comprises mode of operation information.

6. (canceled)

7. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing is performed upon powering off the ultrasound probe.

8. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing is performed periodically.

9. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 further comprising storing the tracking information within an ultrasound system in connection with the ultrasound probe.

10. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to a memory within the ultrasound probe.

11. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to a predetermined address location within a memory within the ultrasound probe.

12. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the ultrasound probe comprises a non-volatile reprogrammable memory and wherein the storing comprises storing the tracking information to the non-volatile reprogrammable memory.

13. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the accessing is performed upon the ultrasound probe being connected to an ultrasound system.

14. (original) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the accessing further comprises accessing probe identification information stored within the ultrasound probe.

15. (original) A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising storing the updated tracking information within an ultrasound system connected to the ultrasound probe.

16. (original) A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising determining a use time period of the ultrasound probe for updating the tracking information based upon a time period when the ultrasound probe is powered on.

17. (original) A method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising determining a use time period of the ultrasound probe for updating the tracking information based upon a time period when the ultrasound probe is scanning.

18. (original) A method in accordance with claim 2 wherein the updated tracking information comprises cumulative tracking information and current use information.

19. (canceled)

20. (previously presented) A method for tracking use of an ultrasound probe, said method comprising:

determining when an ultrasound probe is connected to an ultrasound system;

accessing temperature information when a determination is made that the ultrasound probe is connected to the ultrasound system, the temperature information based on thermistor measurements from the ultrasound probe;

storing the accessed probe temperature information within the ultrasound system;

measuring current temperature conditions for the ultrasound probe;

updating the temperature information with the current temperature conditions; and

storing the updated temperature information within the ultrasound probe.

21. (original) A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the storing of the updated scan time information is performed upon one of powering off the ultrasound probe and ending an ultrasound scan.

22. (original) A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the storing of the updated scan time information is performed periodically during a current scan and further comprising storing the updated scan time information within the ultrasound system.

23. (original) A method in accordance with claim 20 wherein the information is accessed from and stored to a non-volatile reprogrammable memory within the ultrasound probe.

24. (currently amended) An ultrasound system comprising:

an ultrasound scanner; and

an ultrasound probe having a connector for removable connection to the ultrasound scanner, the connector having a memory for storing probe identification information and different types of tracking information, wherein the different types of tracking information include duration of use information, ~~and at least one of~~ length of time between scans information, probe usage pattern information and mode of operation information, the probe usage pattern information including at least a length of time for each use.

25. (original) An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the memory is configured to be accessed by the ultrasound scanner.

26. (original) An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the ultrasound scanner comprises a probe interface for reading information from and writing information to the memory within the ultrasound probe.

27. (previously presented) An ultrasound system according to claim 24 wherein the tracking information further comprises at least one of temperature information and temperature power off information.

28. (previously presented) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing further comprises storing operational parameter information and wherein the probe identification information and different types of tracking information is stored in a first memory and the operational parameter information is stored in a second memory.

29. (previously presented) A method in accordance with claim 28 wherein the first memory is an erasable re-programmable memory and the second memory is a cache memory.

30. (new) A method in accordance with claim 1 wherein the storing comprises storing length of time between scans information determined using a timer within the ultrasound probe that is configured to measure the time between when the ultrasound probe is removed and then connected to the ultrasound system.